

FACT SHEET

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HEALTHFUL LIVING IN AN EMERGENCY

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Maintaining your health is probably one of the most difficult of many problems arising during an emergency.

An emergency situation may be created by any kind of disaster—flood, hurricane, tornado, blizzard, fire or nuclear explosion. During any of these you may be denied access to many or all of the services and facilities normally important to the health of you and your family.

SAFEGUARD YOUR HEALTH NOW

Your best health protection is taking care of your health now, before an emergency. Preparing you and your family for healthful living during an emergency situation includes:

1. Regular medical and dental check-ups, including chest X-rays and tuberculin tests.

- Keep tetanus, smallpox, polio and diphtheria immunizations up-to-date.
- Keep a family record of immunization dates, blood types and other pertinent health data. Carry medical identification cards or tags, noting blood types, an allergy to drugs or necessary medication.

2. Be sure that at least one adult in your family has had either first-aid or medical self-help training. A first-aid course teaches what to do until a doctor arrives. A medical self-help course prepares a person for survival in time of a disaster when the services of a doctor are not available.

KEEPING CLEAN

Keeping clean in an emergency situation can become a matter of life and death, yet it is one of the hardest things to do. People become so overwhelmed by the emergency that they tend to forget cleanliness. Often there is no water to spare, and many of the usual facilities for keeping clean are no longer available.

1. When water cannot be spared for washing, some fairly good substitutes will leave the skin feeling fresh and clean. Much of the dirt from the skin can be wiped off with one of these:

- Rubbing alcohol
- Lotions containing alcohol, such as witch hazel
- Shaving lotions
- Face creams and hand lotions
- Sealed packets of moistened paper towels

A stiff hairbrush and dry shampoo can keep hair clean longer without water. Baking soda, applied with a finger or cloth, makes a satisfactory substitute for toothpaste.

2. Hands need special attention. In a disaster, everything one touches can host disease. There is less chance of transmitting disease when hands are carefully cleansed, especially before handling any food or drinking water. Where water is scarce, use waterless hand cleaners.

3. If water is not available for washing dishes, use paper plates or eat from the can.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL SUPPLIES

Keep on hand an extra supply of life-sustaining or regulatory medication, such as insulin. Those who are allergic, asthmatic or who react severely to bites should have appropriate antidotes available.

Keep a first-aid kit where you can find it easily. Store out of children's reach and renew supplies regularly. Basic supplies might include:

- Antiseptic solution
- Aspirin (5 gr.)
- Baking soda
- Cough mixture
- Diarrhea medication
- Laxative

Nose drops
Petroleum jelly
Rubbing alcohol
Special medicines needed by the family
Water purification materials
First aid manual
Tweezers
Adhesive tape
Sterile gauze pads
Sterile gauze rolls
Cotton-tip applicators
Sterile cotton
Triangle bandages
Plastic strip bandages
Soap with hexachlorophene
Hotwater bag
Safety pins
Scissors
Medicine dropper
Thermometer

EMERGENCY SANITATION

In most emergency situations, the usual means of getting rid of garbage and human wastes are interrupted. Failure to handle and dispose of these wastes properly can lead to the spread of such diseases as typhoid, dysentery or diarrhea. Plans for emergency sanitation should include:

1. Temporary storage of all waste materials in leakproof, covered containers.
2. The use of household disinfectants in each container.
3. Burying under 2 feet of dirt when safe and possible to do so.

The sanitary disposal of wastes is an essential part of vermin and disease control during an emergency situation. Keeping vermin under control now also lessens the health dangers from insects and rodents during an emergency period.

EMERGENCY FOOD AND WATER

To remain healthy during an emergency situation, you also need safe, uncontaminated food and water. Since normal supplies of food and water could be disrupted or contaminated, have a 2-week emergency supply of food and water on hand at all times. A minimum of 2 quarts of water per person per day or 7 gallons per person for a 2-week period is required. Water can be stored in glass jugs or polyethylene containers with tight fitting lids or covers.

Emergency situations cause stress and can cause additional emotional instability. Food is important not only for maintaining our physical but our mental health. Include foods your family likes. Favorite, familiar foods boost morale. Consider the possibility of an emergency situation with no heat or refrigeration, and plan accordingly. Choose foods that can be eaten directly from the can. Canned foods in sizes that will serve the family for one meal eliminate the problem of leftovers and prevent waste. Include special foods for babies or food needed for special diets.

Along with your emergency food and water reserve, store a can opener, matches, disposable eating utensils, candle warmer, aluminum foil, paring knife, measuring cup and spoons, and any other items you might need in an emergency situation.

GOOD HEALTH REQUIRES MORE

Our concern here has been with keeping clean, emergency sanitation and emergency food and water. It is important to remember, however, that to maintain your health during an emergency, your body also needs proper rest, exercise and protection from the elements.